

Welfare Advisors Won't Back Food Stamps

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A "wait and see" attitude on a food stamp program was taken Thursday by the county's Welfare Advisory Commission.

Both food stamps and surplus commodities should be available for the county's poor, the commission decided, and present programs can't offer both.

Approval of a food stamp program was granted Wednesday by the federal Department of Agriculture for Santa Cruz County. But it is up to the county to accept it or not. Food stamps are purchased by the poor at a cut-rate amount and

used as money at local stores for food purchases.

To get the stamps, the county would have to give up surplus commodities. Welfare Director Ray Ansell told the commission this county has a most successful commodities program, with 4300 persons picking up surplus foods each month. There are 9000 welfare recipients in the county.

Counties which have switched to food stamps have a lower participation figure, generally, then this county's, Ansell indicated.

County supervisors have the final decision on the program,

but the welfare commission's refusal to recommend the program is a key factor.

Instead, the commission will ask Congressman Burt Talcott and a congressional committee to support the McGovern bill to allow both food stamps and surplus commodities.

Eileen Jensen, chief of the state's Food Stamp Bureau, told the commission chances are good there will be some "pilot" programs of that type set up soon.

"It would take three to six months to switch from surplus commodities to food stamps in any case," Welfare Director Ray

Ansell explained today. "There may be action to allow both programs by that time."

Different groups of poor persons want different programs, he noted. The elderly prefer food Stamps, because they cannot get the foods they want through the farm surplus foods now offered.

"The starches and heavier foods in the surplus commodities don't fit their diet needs," Ansell said.

On the other hand, poor persons with large families like the surplus commodities because larger amounts of food are available.

Should Congress fail to approve a dual program, the county still can switch to food stamps at a later date.

Though the food stamp program has been liberalized, with the costs of the stamps cut by almost half, counties using food stamps have had their problems. Stanislaus County was the subject of a serious food shortage in December which resulted in a court order to supply surplus foods on a temporary basis. "We don't know whether the food stamps had anything to do with that, however," Ansell said.